

## The Signal

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## Protect the Eastern Sierra

### Local Commentary

#### By Bill Bailey

As a local realtor, I was delighted in 2006 when our Congressman “Buck” McKeon, R-Santa Clarita, introduced the Eastern Sierra Rural Heritage and Economic Enhancement Act, which would protect the popular Hoover Wilderness Additions and the Amargosa River, a rare perennial desert river. Unfortunately, the clock ran out on that Congress and the bill didn’t pass.

But there is time to improve and re-introduce this visionary bill this year.

The benefits to our community are significant. Being within proximity of wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, parks and trails, whether here in Santa Clarita or up in Bishop or Mammoth, not only enhances our quality of life, but also increases our property values, attracts new businesses, jobs, and retirees, protects and improves the quality of our drinking water, and reduces taxes.

Even the draw of the Eastern Sierra adds to the economic well-being of our community. Since the Eastern Sierra are within an easy, and beautiful, three- to five-hour drive from Santa Clarita, our city is an important gateway for all those who wish to “get away from it all,” pursue a variety of recreational activities, or simply relax and enjoy the spectacular mountain views.

It is an axiom of the real estate business that location is everything. Our nearby natural amenities and the scenic views and quality of life they provide make Santa Clarita an attractive location to buy a home, settle in and contribute to this great community, so it is important to protect these amenities when we can. For these reasons, Congressman McKeon should re-introduce his bill to protect scenic jewels in the Eastern Sierra.

The proposed Hoover Wilderness Addition is one of the most popular destinations in the Eastern Sierra, and the proposed “wild and scenic” Amargosa River is a rare year-round desert stream in Death Valley that sustains important wildlife habitats and is home to more than 260 bird species, ancient landscapes, and even a portion of the Old Spanish Trail. Protecting these places is a great first step.

However, Rep. McKeon still has time to expand his bill to protect other special places in the Eastern Sierra, and he could even consider adding some areas closer to Santa Clarita as well. Less than an hour’s drive from Santa Clarita are several proposed wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers that deserve to be protected and which could be added to the current legislation — places such as Santa Clarita Canyons, Magic Mountain, Piru Creek and Pleasant View Ridge.

As our state, city, and nearby communities are undergoing an unprecedented growth — by 2050 it is estimated that our current population will have almost doubled to 60 million — it is vital that we preserve treasured wild places while we still have a chance.

Santa Clarita, and those of us who call it home, will benefit greatly if more of these proposed local wilderness areas and wild rivers are included in a new Eastern Sierra bill. I urge Congressman McKeon to expand his efforts to include these special places and to reintroduce his bill. Our personal quality of life and the economic well-being of our community would benefit, and Santa Clarita’s current and future generations would thank him for it.

*Bill Bailey is a board member of the Santa Clarita Valley Environmental Council. His view represents his own and not necessarily that of The Signal.*

*Editor’s note: A spokesman for Congressman McKeon’s office says the congressman is in negotiations with Senator Barbara Boxer to move the proposed wilderness bill through Congress this session.*